

Organic mission to save earth

SHYKH SERAJ

Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote "The soil of my land is richer than pure gold". Truly, the soil of Bangladesh is more pure than gold. The fertility of this soil was once a matter of wonder. The silt deposited from the rivers used to expedite the cultivation of crops. However, at present it is who have polluted the soil and in turn have reduced its fertility. Chemical fertilisers are being used in the fields to produce more food for an ever-growing population across the country. And, excessive tilling has caused the land to become unfertile and lose its organic characteristics. The farmers don't know how much and what type of fertilisers to use for an optimum yield. Not much work has been done from the agricultural departments of the government in this matter.

For the past few years, I have asked farmers whether they do soil tests or not. In reply, less than one percent of them have affirmed that they have done soil tests. The sad part is that there aren't even five percent of farmers who have heard of soil tests whereas these people should be the ones to already have the idea that organic materials are the life source of the soil. As they don't know this important information, they have kept using chemical fertilisers for a long period of time.

This has reduced the level of organic matters in the soil in most areas around the country. This is a great concern for the growing population. I am an optimist and I believe that like any other problem our farmers will come out of this. We just need the right initiative and its execution to resolve such problem. Those who are trying to come out of this crisis, I have featured them on *Hridoye Mati O Manush's* regular segment *Grow Green* which has inspired many farmers, entrepreneurs and the youth community. They have learned to understand that there is no other option than a technologically rich procedure of farming. There is no other option than to think about ensuring the good health of the soil first. The television shows have influenced youngsters who have undertaken endeavours to bring real change in the farming scenario. And the change had to start from correcting the soil.

Dear readers, I want to tell you about an entrepreneur named Kamrul Hasan Ripon. This young man from Arani village of Rajshahi's Bagha upazila has taken a different approach. On one side he is encouraging farmers to do soil tests during farming and on the other hand, he is helping people out in using environment friendly fertilizer.

Few days back, after filming the *Krishhi Budget Krishoker Budget* segment at Natore, I started for Rajshahi to see Ripon's project, Greenlight. On my way, my vision kept drifting to the crop fields by the road. This area is full of diversified crops now. The



Kamrul Hasan Ripon, middle, testing soil with his colleagues from Greenlight.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

farmers are producing high yielding and cost effective fruits such as Dragon fruits, guava and malta. Moreover, they are growing foreign vegetables. Raw mangoes are hanging from the trees and let's not forget the moringa. This is the season for moringa and it is abundant, not only on the fields but also in the markets.

It was morning by the time we reached Arani village. Ripon was waiting for me. I learned from him how his project is going on. He told me how he got inspired to stick with farming, watching early 80s BTV farm-show, *Mati O Manush*. Since then he has kept his eyes on Channel i's *Hridoye Mati O Manush*. He has tried to comprehend and innovate something which will really cure the health of the soil and also increase production. Most importantly, his goal was to improve the livelihood of farmers. After completing his studies, he started a job and then started thinking about doing something himself.

He left his job in 2016 and started his own green enterprise and included other educated agro-enthusiasts from his region. Their combined efforts have resulted into 'Greenlight Soil Development Limited'. This

enterprise is working to take ahead the organic development of the soil in their locality.

At present, their work has spread across eight upazilas of Rajshahi. He has organised various farming field discussions to let the farmers know about the benefits of organic farming. He is making the farmers understand that it is necessary to bring back the soil's health. He's going to farmer homes at villages across his region and telling the urgency of bringing back soil quality and how they can actually do it.

These young bunches test and prescribe proper fertilisers for the soil for quality food production at a cheap rate. Farmer Aminul Islam says that he has been farming guava for three years taking three bighas of land on lease. The first year, the harvest was good but the second year, the numbers were a bit down. Last year Ripon and his team went there and did soil tests and prescribed him to use organic fertilizer. After using organic fertilizer, this year the yield was really impressive. The best part of this is that his production cost has reduced and the size of the guavas has increased.

Previously, he used to get guavas, weighing

300 to 400 gram, and this year the weight of each has become 600 grams to one kilogram. I asked him how the production costs had decreased. He told me that Ripon's prescribed organic fertilizer reduced the usage of chemical fertilisers. The price is only Tk 600 per maund, far lesser than the TSP.

Another farmer Ataur Rahman told me that he spent Tk 3 lakh to farm guava on 4.5 bighas of land and has sold guavas worth Tk 10 lakh. It is because he has used organic fertilisers. That's why he's got such incredible profits this season.

Onion farmer Himel told me his story of making profits. He told me that after using organic fertilizer the use of chemical fertilizer is lessened and the amount of irrigation also reduced. Last year he had to spend Tk 35 thousand for farming onions over one bigha of land and had gotten 70 maunds of onions. This year due to usage of organic fertilisers his expense was Tk 22 thousand and in return he yielded 120 maunds of onion.

After talking to the farmers it was evident that they know that in order to increase quality and healthy production, regular soil tests are necessary along with

ensuring the amount of organic materials in the soil. And this big change has been brought by Ripon and his team. However, the biggest challenge in front of these young entrepreneurs is keeping up with the finances. They said that if they had gotten the proper financial support they could have spread this even faster.

Educated young enthusiasts like Ripon will be the ones to take charge of farming in future and take the country ahead towards development and enrichment. The future farming is heading to the destination where it is accompanied by technology. Free market economy and adverse climate changes need to be tackled. And that is why endeavours of educated entrepreneurs like Ripon is more and more required. I have introduced many more such youngsters who are weaving new dreams. They have crossed many obstacles and have gone ahead. I believe that Ripon and his team will go very far with their dream. Every farmer will produce crops through soil tests and return the organic properties of the soil by using organic fertilisers. The soil will again have its fertility and the lands will be rich like gold as dreamt by Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received



country's two highest civilian honours, *Swadhinata Puroshkar* and *Ekushey Padak*, respectively. He is an Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, *Hridoye Mati O Manush*.

Granthakutir, home for young learners

ABDUL WAHED, Kurigram

In a bid to spread the joy of reading among the people in their vicinity, a couple has set up a library inside their very home at a remote village in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila.

The library named "Granthakutir" came into being eight years ago when there were only 322 books, recalls Abu Sayeed Molla, 45, the owner.

"Now it has 1,084 books and most of our readers are students of the locality," Sayeed told this correspondent adding that his wife Rinee Begum, 38, was the one to inspire him.

Sayeed, who works for a tea company, has been a book worm since his college days.

In the 90s, he was moved by the signature "mobile library" project of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro. Initially he used to borrow books but then started to purchase them.

Sayeed obtained his graduation degree in 1995.

After marriage in 2000, his long cherished dream of setting up a library saw the light with encouragement from his wife.

"She saw the vast collection of books in my bedroom and encouraged me to turn it into a library," said Sayeed. "The library remains open from 3:00pm until dusk every day. There

are over 100 regular readers most of whom are students. Rinee serves as the librarian."

Sayeed and Rinee have three sons -- all school goers.

The couple buys one book every month. But the collection is not enough to meet the demand of the readers, believes Rinee.

During a recent visit to the library at Harishwar Taluk village in the upazila, this correspondent saw a wide range of books, all arranged in shelves.

Fictions, poetry, drama, children's books, travelogues, science fictions, biographies, religious books and magazines were among them.

Some school girls were found studying there sitting on benches. They said they were not prohibited from coming there as it was a library set up inside a home.

One publisher 'Oitijya' donated 182 books worth Tk 35,000 to the library in September 2018, according to the couple.

Granthakutir is registered under the Department of Public Libraries.

The Liberation War Museum donated six books and 100 photographs from the compilation, "History of Liberation Struggle of Bangladesh in Pictures" in 2012.

The couple also runs different awareness

campaigns on child marriage and tree plantation. Cultural programmes, drawing competitions, debates and discussions on books are also arranged for the students, they told this paper.

Miftahul Jannat, a college goer, regularly comes to Granthakutir. "Here I get to spend time in a homely atmosphere. The collection may not be outstanding but it is good enough for school kids in a remote area like this."

Jemi Akhter, a ninth grader, said she had been coming to the library for the last two years.

"I come here to read because I do not have the financial capacity to buy books. The discussions and debates broaden my knowledge and eventually help me perform better in study."

Sushanto Barman, a faculty member at Kurigram Government Women's College, praised the couple over the initiative. "I visited the library two months ago and donated some books then," he said.

"I was pleased to see that the students were reading there instead of wasting their time in other unproductive activities. The book lover couple is surely playing a part in enlightening the citizens of this country," Sushanto added.



In a bid to get relief from the scorching summer heat, a group of women and children having icecream. The photo was taken from Dhuburia area in Tangail's Nagarpur upazila on Monday.

PHOTO: STAR

Villagers' clash leaves woman killed, 15 hurt

Bus driver jailed for 4yrs

The clash ensued when victim's 2 sons were taking harvested paddy through their neighbour's land

A Feni court yesterday sentenced a bus driver to four years' rigorous imprisonment for breaking a barrier poll of a rail crossing and interrupting public safety.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The convict is Bashir Gazi, a resident of Kartikpasha village in Dhumki upazila of Patuakhali.

A woman, who sustained critical injuries during a clash between two groups of villagers allegedly over a trivial matter at Gojarikanda village in Itna upazila of Kishoreganj on Monday, died at a hospital yesterday.

The deceased, Nurunnahar, 36, was wife of Faizur Rahman of the village.

Quoting locals and victim's family members, Officer in Charge (OC) of Itna Police Station Morshed Zaman said an altercation took place between Nununhar's two sons -- Shakil and Shamim-- and one of their neighbours Sirajul Islam and his men while the brothers were taking their harvested Boro paddy in a trolley through Sirajul's land on Monday afternoon.

At one stage, both the groups attacked each other with sharp weapons that left 16 people including Nurunnahar injured, the OC said.

Family members took injured Nurunnahar to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries yesterday morning, he said, adding that they recovered the body and sent it to the hospital for autopsy.

Feni Senior Judicial Magistrate Abdullah Khan handed down the verdict yesterday afternoon in his absence.

According to the prosecution, a Dhaka-bound bus hit a barrier poll of Gumti Gate level crossing and broke it while crossing the area on December 11, 2012.

Railway's Deputy Assistant Engineer at Feni Aminul Islam Chowdhury later filed a case against the bus driver for causing the financial loss and interrupting public safety.



Abu Sayeed Molla and his wife Rinee Begum sit with some students inside the library set up at the couple's Harishwar Taluk village home in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila.

PHOTO: ABDUL WAHED